

A mother in Narragansett, RI, shared a story about her 20-year-old son who suffers from severe bipolar disorder and relies on therapy and expensive medications to remain a valued and productive member of his community. He is too old to be covered under her family health insurance plan, and his pre-existing condition makes buying insurance on the individual market impossible—prohibitively expensive. So what did they do? This mother and her family came up with a surprising solution. They enrolled her son at the Community College of Rhode Island so he could participate in the student health insurance plan. He takes the absolute minimum course load in order to continue to work, but he remains a student because it is less expensive to pay for college tuition than it is to pay for individual health insurance. Any parent with a child in college knows what a burden this Rhode Island family is bearing to ensure that their son gets the basic treatment he needs to stay healthy.

I also heard from the proud owner of a small bookkeeping and tax preparation business in Warwick, RI. She has worked tirelessly to raise five sons, go back to college, and finally she has become her own boss. Yet despite all her effort and all her success, she wrote me to plead for reform. She wrote this:

I spend over 50 percent of my income just to have health insurance for my husband and myself. The premiums are over \$1,000 per month, even with very high deductibles. My employees need health insurance also, but I am unable to provide them with any benefits because of the poor economic conditions.

Her employees are like family to her, as with so many small businesses, and it breaks her heart that they are uninsured. Yet she says she simply will not be able to keep her doors open if she tried to contribute toward their benefits.

In the midst of this economic downturn, and particularly in Rhode Island where the unemployment rate is one of the highest in the Nation, this story shows all too clearly how closely linked are the tasks of reforming our health care system and strengthening our economy.

Our health care system manages to fail even those who believe themselves to be covered. A woman who lives in Woonsocket and who has health insurance and was always careful to pay her bills on time, assumed she would be covered in the event of an emergency. Why not? She was current. She paid her premiums. She had insurance. But not too long ago, she suddenly had to have her appendix removed. Despite having health insurance, she left that hospital with a \$10,000 bill. She is currently working for a temp service and she has no idea how she can pay off this debt. She had recently bought her own home, a longtime dream and an accomplishment in which she took great pride. Now, because of the fine print of that health insurance policy, she risks losing the home she worked so long to

afford. As this Rhode Islander learned in the hardest way possible, health insurance often ends up ensuring very little.

It is on behalf of these Rhode Islanders and so many others that I urge my colleagues to come together to support health care reform that will lower costs and improve the quality of care for all Americans. We must improve the way we deliver health care by promoting quality, implementing health information technology, and investing in preventing disease. We must, and will, protect existing coverage when it is good, we must improve it when it is not, and we must guarantee health care for the 46 million Americans, 9 million of whom are children who have no health insurance at all.

We see ourselves now in darkening and tumultuous economic times. Yet looking beyond the immediate economic perils we face, there is a \$35 trillion unfunded liability for Medicare that is bearing down on us. It is bearing down on us because our population is aging, because people get sicker as they age, and that makes them more expensive. Unless we figure out a way in this Chamber to stop time, unless we figure out a way in this Chamber to reverse the aging process, unless we figure out a way in this Chamber to make elders have healthier lives and bodies than younger people, this is inevitable. It is coming at us, and we have to prepare. In order to prepare, we have to reform the health care delivery system. We are committed, as Democrats, to making sure every American has health insurance coverage, but it is not enough just to bring everyone into the boat. If you had a boat in the ocean and people swimming around it and to save them you needed to bring them into the boat, you would do that. But if the boat itself was sinking, if the boat itself was on fire, just bringing everybody into the boat is not an adequate discharge of your duties. It is also important that you repair the boat, that you get it steaming forward, that you make sure it is safe for the people whom you bring into it.

That means reforming our health information technology infrastructure so every American can count on an electronic health record, so when you go to see your doctor, you don't have to fill out that clipboard one time after another, when at the same time you can sign on to Amazon and not only do they know who you are, they know what you have bought and they have suggestions for you based on your buying habits. There is no excuse for our health care system being back in the 1950s as the rest of the economy moves forward into the 21st century. It requires improving the quality of health care and it requires investing in prevention.

We dramatically underinvest in prevention and quality. There are market failures that cause those things to happen. They are repairable. In addition to the cost savings, it is estimated that

100,000 Americans die every year—100,000 Americans die every year—because of avoidable medical errors. It is simply not tolerable to allow that to continue, particularly when it is a win-win situation, where improved quality of care means lower costs.

Finally, the third leg of the reform, in addition to helping infrastructure technology and quality and prevention reform, is that we have to reform how we pay for health care to align the price signal that we send by those payments with what we want from health care. Until we do that, we will be constantly struggling uphill against our own financial message.

This is all doable. This is all so doable, but it will take time. These are complex matters. We will have to make adjustments. The adjustments will take time. It is a dynamic environment which will have to make course corrections along the way. That means we need to start now. We do not have the luxury of time on our side. If we do not get started on a thorough-going health care delivery system reform now, then the alternative will be times that are even darker and more tumultuous than we find ourselves in right now.

I see the very distinguished chairman of the Budget Committee on the floor, a man who is an eloquent voice on the dark and tumultuous times and the risks we face from the current fiscal situation, so I will gladly yield at this point, and I thank the Presiding Officer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

CBO REPORT

Mr. CONRAD. Madam President, first of all, I wish to thank Senator WHITEHOUSE for his contributions to this Chamber. He has been an outstanding Member. He serves on the Budget Committee with me. He has developed a special expertise on health care which is so badly needed.

I wish to comment very briefly on the CBO report we received today in the Budget Committee hearing on the fiscal outlook. It is truly jaw-dropping. There is a \$1.2 trillion deficit for this year, before any economic recovery package is passed. Add to the debt even higher: \$1.6 trillion will be added to the debt of the country, and, again, that is before any cost of an economic recovery plan.

If one factors in an economic recovery plan, we could be looking at an increase in the debt of \$2 trillion this year alone. To put that in context, we have a gross debt of the United States of \$10.6 trillion roughly today.

So I think it is imperative that while we put together an economic recovery plan, which we must, we also are cognizant of the very serious long-term fiscal condition we face as a nation.

There is a front-page story in the New York Times today indicating that the Chinese, the biggest financiers of our debt, have a reduced appetite for

American dollar-denominated debt because they have their own economic issues, their own need for the use of capital at home. This could have enormous consequences for us going forward in terms of interest rates and what it will take to attract foreign capital to float this economic boat.

One final point. Last year, of the new debt financing for this country, 68 percent of it came from abroad. Madam President, 68 percent of our new debt financing came from abroad. The fact that the Chinese, who have been the most significant contributors to financing that debt, are expressing a reluctance to take on more of our debt, do more of our debt financing, should send a warning signal to all of us as we fashion long-term fiscal and economic policy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I wish to ask, through the Chair, a question of the distinguished chairman of the Budget Committee with respect to the \$10 trillion debt the country is now carrying.

At the time the current administration that is leaving office came into office 8 years ago, my understanding is the situation in America was rather different. It is my understanding that at that time we were actually looking at surpluses in our country, and the \$10 trillion deficit is largely the responsibility of the policies that have been followed over the past 8 years.

Mr. CONRAD. The Senator is exactly right. The debt of the country at the beginning of the last administration was about \$5 trillion. They have approximately doubled the debt of the country on their watch, dramatically more than doubled foreign holdings of U.S. debt. So the current administration, the outgoing administration, has left the incoming administration in a very deep hole, not to mention the economic difficulties and the extreme need for an economic recovery plan to give lift to this economy.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. So through the good times, we could have been laying money aside so that when this situation came, we would be in a strong economic condition. Instead, by squandering all those years, we have put the incoming administration in a very challenging position.

Mr. CONRAD. Yes, not only the incoming administration, the whole country because our ability to cope with an economic downturn, the flexibility is substantially limited by what has already been done to dramatically increase the debt, as the Senator described, in good economic times. Unfortunately, that is the reality we now confront.

Today's news by the Congressional Budget Office of not only the \$1.2 trillion deficit this year but massive deficits as far as the eye can see should sober us all.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I thank the very distinguished chairman of the Budget

Committee for being willing to engage in this colloquy with me.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Senator from Rhode Island and look forward to working with him on the Budget Committee as we attempt to come up with a plan to deal with these multiple challenges.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will stand in recess until 4:45 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 3:34 p.m., recessed until 4:45 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. KLOBUCHAR).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, under the rules, have we been in a quorum call or in recess?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We have been in a recess.

GLOBAL WARMING

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, first of all, I appreciate your coming from your meeting to preside. As we begin the new Congress and a new administration, we begin a new chapter on energy and environmental policy, and it is a time that environmental activists, the United Nations, and many of my Democratic colleagues have been salivating for for years. The stars are all aligned. Democrats control both sides of Pennsylvania Avenue, and the Supreme Court has spoken now that carbon dioxide is a pollutant under the Clear Air Act, even though it was a 5-to-4 decision. It is kind of interesting how something can be a pollutant with a 5-to-4 decision.

It is believed the stage has been set for a home run on mandatory Kyoto-like climate controls and the dawn of a new bustling green energy economy. However, before many of my colleagues rush to leap before they look, I wish to remind them of some very unfortunate developments that may complicate their early action on items on their wish lists. I ask my colleagues to at least consider some of the facts I will be revealing over the next series of speeches and to keep an open mind before rushing to sweeping action after waiting for so many years.

The scale and pace of the climate proposals and the regulatory actions we have debated in the past, including the recently failed Lieberman-Warner bill and the ones we will likely be debating this Congress, leave little room for error in this fragile, recession-ridden economy, and the inflated promises of a sweeping green jobs revolution need an honest and frank reality. The proponents of mandatory global warming controls need to be honest with the American people. The purpose of these programs is to ration fossil-based energy by making it more expensive and therefore less appealing for public consumption. It is a regressive tax that

imposes a greater burden relative to resources on the poor than it does on the rich. Let me say that again. The purpose of these programs is to ration the fossil fuel-based energy by making it more expensive to all Americans and therefore less appealing for public consumption. But it is a regressive tax, and we have talked about this before. It is one that punishes those whose resources have to be used for such purposes as being able to operate their vehicles and heat their homes.

Advocates may argue that the redistribution of wealth toward the income consumers will offset the balance of revenue or taxes being taken in, but we learned firsthand during the Lieberman-Warner debate that this simply is not true. I don't like the argument that we have equal distribution of wealth efforts that are going to take a regressive nature out of the punitive values of this type of program. To me, there is something un-American about that. But while the bill's sponsors try to convince us there is actually tax relief in the bill, we learn that families—now I am talking about the Lieberman-Warner bill, and this was only about 8 months ago, the Lieberman-Warner bill—we learn that families with workers will still have to pay \$6.7 trillion into the system in the form of higher energy costs to get back an estimated \$802 billion in tax relief. That is a return of \$1 out of every \$8.40 paid. It is time that proponents of climate policies be honest. It is expensive, and it is going to cost taxpayers a lot of money.

You know, it doesn't really matter which form we use. We have gone through, first of all, the Kyoto Treaty. We came this close to passing the Kyoto Treaty, and it wasn't until the Wharton School of Economics came along with the econometrics survey and they determined it would cost some \$300 billion a year to join onto and actually try to achieve the emission requirements of Kyoto. Then along came the McCain-Lieberman bill and then after that the Warner-Lieberman bill. And cap and trade is going to be about the same amount. They may massage it a little bit, but we are still talking in the neighborhood of \$300 billion a year. That equates to over \$2,000 for each tax-paying family in America. So it is huge.

In the coming weeks, I will go into more detail about other false promises proponents of mandatory global warming policies are advocating. Among them are a reality check on green projects—the number of new green jobs from a climate regime are overstated compared to the number of manufacturing jobs lost, and we know from the National Association of Manufacturers how many jobs would have been lost with any of these schemes in the past; a review of the weaknesses of offset policies—companies have bought offsets which are not real; and a review of the attempts to estimate the cost of inaction. Many advocates are claiming it